

A WINTER TRIP
ON THE
CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY.



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Christmas and New Year in the Snow,

1885—6.

*Written for Private Circulation, at the request of his friends, after an
absence of 22 years from the Old Country;*

BY

M. P.

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 **N**O doubt you read in the English newspapers, late last autumn, an announcement of the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railway to the Pacific Coast.

I live in British Columbia, in Kootenay, in the interior, between the mighty Selkirk Range and the Rocky Mountains, on the western slope of the latter, about 160 miles south of the railroad; and I proposed paying a visit to England for the winter.

When I read in the *Victoria*, B.C., and in all the Pacific Coast papers, an account of the opening of the Dominion Railway from

the Atlantic to the Pacific, I decided upon taking that route for England. One newspaper, like history, might lie! But when all the newspapers proclaim the joyful event—“The West shakes hands with the East,” “The Last Spike driven in the Eagle Pass,” could there be a doubt of the practicability of that route? The so-called “Last Spike” was indeed driven in by Mr. Donald Smith, in the presence of a few friends; and also, naïvely adds the *Victoria Chronicle*, “the whole thing was performed without any ceremony—quietly.” Yes, they were wise in their generation to drive in the “Last Spike” on the quiet; but wiser far would they have been had they drawn a veil over this part of the scene altogether. Was it a fact that the railway was really open; or, if a fact, was it other than a delusive one? For, for how long was the railway open? Sympathy, indeed, would the poor deluded traveller have deserved who attempted to reach the Pacific Coast, by the Canadian Pacific Railway, even a few weeks after the announcement of the opening. The road-bed was not finished; the rails were laid temporarily for the sake of

passing over a few distinguished men, and then the whole mountain section was closed up. At this moment, hundreds of miles of railway, from Canmore in the Rocky Mountains to far west of the Eagle Pass, lie buried beneath the snow; and property that cost millions lies unused and idle. Already (in December, 1885) the rails and track have been swept away in many places in the Selkirk Range by devastating snow-slides (avalanches). To-day, communication is kept up, and the mail carried by tobogans on this portion of the railway;—sleigh-dogs now replace the locomotive.

A deserted house or cabin looks dreary in these mountains, a deserted town more dismal yet; but imagine, if you can, a railway deserted! Hundreds of miles of line abandoned! Signal-boxes, stations, small towns lifeless, and fast being buried beneath the snow, or battered to pieces by fierce mountain storms!

The Railway Company have given out now that they will re-open the line on the 1st of May, 1886, and will then reduce their fares, &c. Impossible! A wild dream! Or if, at

an immense expense, they should shovel away the snow, which will then, in the mountains, be from 20 ft. to 30 ft. deep, could they keep the line open, for any practical good, even for a single day? Then the warm weather will have commenced, and the snow have been loosened. Hardly an hour will pass without an avalanche sweeping over some portion of the line, carrying with it the "permanent" way into the ravine below.

I do not myself think that it will ever be possible to keep the railroad open through the Selkirk--Range, certainly never during the winter and spring. The Company may make snow-sheds through the entire Range, but can they make sheds strong enough to withstand the snow-slides which, in these mountains, carry trees, huge rocks, and everything along with them, and sweep bare the whole mountain side?

If, as a matter of Imperial or Canadian policy, it was necessary to carry the line so far north, not less than one hundred miles from the United States Boundary, would it not have been better to have gone yet a little further north, and have taken it round the

bend of the Columbia River, as was at first proposed, before Major Rogers discovered his supposed pass through the Selkirk Range? To have done this would have increased the length of the Railway by nearly forty miles; but, by following the valley of the Columbia, the Selkirk mountains, with all their difficulties and dangers, would have been avoided. Even now, it would hardly cost more to follow the Columbia round from Donald to the Eagle Pass (through the Gold Range) than to complete the line and make snow-sheds across the Selkirk.

But let me, in a few short words, describe my own trip to the Atlantic by the Canadian Pacific Railway.

I left Kootenay, on the head waters of the Columbia River, on December 15th, and, four days afterwards, reached the railway at a point where it first strikes the Columbia River, after crossing the Rocky Mountains, and enters the Selkirk Range. Here there is a small town called Golden City. The railroad through the Selkirk, towards the Pacific coast, had long before been closed up. An occasional train

had, indeed, up to this time crossed the Rocky Mountains and run as far as Donald, fifteen miles north of Golden City; but, beyond this, the line was hopelessly blocked.

I arrived at Golden City on Saturday, just in time for the last train going East, which was taking back all the railway employés who had been discharged for the winter. The railway enters the Rocky Mountains through the cañon formed by the Kicking Horse River. For the first ten miles the valley is very narrow, the mountains rising almost perpendicularly on either side of the stream. The railway crosses and recrosses the river many times, and is for miles cut in the mountain side. There are here four tunnels; and it would have been better if there had been more tunnelling, as, in places, the mountain rises many thousands of feet perpendicularly, and has the appearance of actually overhanging the railway. Even the vibration of a passing train is said at times to bring down large masses of rock, which, gaining velocity as they descend from the mountain heights, would, if they struck a train, hardly add to the comfort of the passengers.

The railway follows the winding of the Kicking Horse River; and the grade, for the first forty miles, is so gradual that the rise is hardly perceptible.

We passed two small stations, Palliser and Otter Tail, both of which are now deserted; and obtaining an additional locomotive at Field, another siding, we commenced the ascent of the actual summit. Passing over a very high wooden trestle, the speed of our train soon fell from fifteen to three or four miles an hour, the snorting and puffing of the locomotives shewing with what difficulty the ascent was made. The foremost, one of great size and power, is used solely, I believe, for passing and repassing trains across the summit. Indeed, the grade for eight or ten miles on the western slope, approaching the summit, is steeper far than anything I have ever seen in the way of ordinary railway engineering. After about an hour, a few jerks and tugs threw us all out of our seats, and we came to a standstill. Then followed a few more jerks and tugs, as the locomotives in vain attempted to start us, the wheels slipping round and round without biting the rails.

I got out to have a look around. We were now far up the mountain side, the river appearing but as a silver thread away in the ravine below us. The scenery was wild and grand, and very wintry. Rugged and jagged mountain tops towered far above us in every direction ; great tracks were to be seen on the mountain sides everywhere, shewing where avalanches of former years had swept down.

The snow was not so deep as I had expected to have found it, not more than two feet, and less on the actual track, where the locomotive coming over on the previous day had swept some of it away. Up to this time we had had really no winter ; usually, at this time of the year, the snow lies from ten to fifteen feet on the summit of the pass, and increases in depth until the beginning of May.

After some delay the locomotives started off by themselves, leaving us in the cars. The drivers must have had considerable difficulty in breaking a track through to the summit, as several hours elapsed before they returned to bring us on, although the distance could not have been more than seven or eight miles. It was now getting late, and the short winter

day fast drawing to a close. The train, however, made better time than I had hoped for, considering the steepness of the ascent; and we arrived at Laggan, four miles on the eastern side of the summit, before it was quite dark.

Laggan was the first Rocky Mountain station we had come to which was not absolutely deserted. Here, in the summer time, a spare locomotive is kept for the purpose of helping trains across the summit. The town is composed of a small wooden-frame station, an engine tank, one store, one hotel—I think deserted, and a few shanties.

From Laggan, to the point where the railway clears out of the Rocky Mountains, the line passes down a valley of several miles in width, the descent being very easy.

The next station was Silver City. I do not think anyone lives at this place now, although somebody appears to have made a great but futile effort to found a city here. Not only are there the usual frame buildings, with "saloon," "store," or "hotel" painted on them, and where, no doubt, the owners carried on a considerable business during the con-

struction of the railway, but there are also a great number of large but half-finished houses, which seemed to speak of a "city" which had fallen into a decline while yet in its babyhood; and saloons, stores, hotels, houses, all were deserted.

A few miles further on we came to another station, or rather siding, for there is but a double line of rails for a few hundred yards. There are no buildings; but the words, "Castle Mountain," appear on a board. A singular, massive, towering-mountain, standing out from the range, gives, I suppose, its name to the place. Here on our right, travelling East, we had a view of a fine range of ragged, fantastically-shaped peaks.

The last of the Rocky Mountain towns is Canmore, which was to have been the winter terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway; and here the company have Round Houses, and keep spare locomotives.

We stopped at Canmore for the night, leaving again early in the morning for Calgary, 78 miles distant.

Soon after leaving Canmore, the valley widens out; and grass on the mountain slopes

shewed that we were fast approaching the plains. The train now bowled along right merrily, going probably thirty miles an hour, which seemed an immense speed after the tediously slow pace at which we had been travelling whilst crossing the Rocky Mountains. A few minutes more and we looked out on beautiful, rolling hills, covered everywhere with luxuriant buffalo grass. This is the charming Bow River Valley. We were fast leaving the timber behind us, there being now only a fringe along the edge of the river. Now and again we passed a homestead or farm; but we saw no sign of snow, although we were far into December.

We arrived at Calgary about noon; and here the train stopped some little time, enabling me to take a walk round the town. Probably it will become a place of some importance at no very distant date.

The town site is perfectly level, and the population about 2,000. The Hudson Bay Company have a fine modern store here, in the place of their old fort, Mountain House. About two hundred mounted police are stationed at Calgary; the barracks are about a mile distant from the town.

We made a start again about three o'clock in the afternoon. The Rocky Mountains passed, I almost thought myself in England. No more trouble now from snow!

The weather, which up to this time had been most beautifully mild, began to change, and before night the thermometer fell to many degrees below zero. The cold must have been much more severe out on the plains than it was near the mountains, as not only was the river frozen, but, a few miles from Calgary, we found ourselves in the midst of snow, running through a snow-covered plain, which stretched in every direction as far as the eye could reach. This was my first night on the cars while in motion; and I did not sleep much, being unaccustomed to the motion and rattle of the train.

Some time during the night we arrived at Medicine Hat, a station far out on the plains. I bestirred myself, and began to walk up and down the cars, as the cold had become extreme—35 degrees below zero,—a fierce blizzard from the north-east, after passing over hundreds of miles of unbroken and snow-

covered plains, sweeping down upon us with cruel intensity. The cars are most comfortable in ordinary cold weather. There are double glasses to the windows, and a stove at each end of every car; but now the cold and the wind seemed to come in everywhere. In vain did the car attendants and brakemen poke and throw coal on the stoves; it was impossible to raise the temperature. So cold was it that, even when standing close to the stoves, it was almost impossible to keep warm; and only one or two passengers at a time could get near each stove. The stoves appear to have been too much boxed up to give out much heat; but probably this has been done as a precaution against fire in case of the cars upsetting. A little before daylight the engine was uncoupled, and went forward for water, leaving the train standing on the track for hours. There are engine tanks, with a sort of "windmill" arrangement for raising the water, at intervals along the line in crossing the plains; and small and solitary landmarks they seemed in the wide expanse of prairie.

On the open plains the wind had swept the

snow from the track; and we steamed ahead all day at a fine pace. The cold seemed less formidable by daylight, as the passengers kept moving about, and crowding round the stoves. At a little after six in the evening we arrived at Moose Jaw. The conductor had telegraphed forward stating how many passengers were in the train; and we found a really good dinner ready for us at the Railway Company's hotel. We remained at Moose Jaw about half an hour. By the lights there appeared to be quite a little town. On our return to the platform we found fresh cars, another engine, a new conductor, &c.

The cars are simply superb. The crimson velvet cushions, the gilding, chandeliers, and gorgeous fittings, compare strangely with the dingy and confined compartments of an English railway carriage. The cars on all the Canadian and United States railways are between 30 ft. and 40 ft. long; and passengers can pass from one car to another. The sleeping cars are fitted up with lavatory, and, on a small scale, with all the conveniences that are found in the cabin of an Atlantic steamer. West of Winnipeg, during the present winter,

there are no emigrant or cheap rates, and only the saloon cars.

The conductor called us all aboard,—not that we needed much calling, for the platform was cold, and the cars nice and warm. The stoves were nearly red hot, and not shut in with sheet-iron casing as we had them across the plains from Calgary. Once more we shot out into solitude,—level plain around, and innumerable stars above, but so terribly cold looking. Some time during the night we passed Regina, the new capital of the North-West, where the Lieutenant-Governor, Mr. Dewdney, resides. At Regina are also the head-quarters of the mounted police.

When morning came, we were still steaming away across the level, snow-covered plain.

About midday we arrived at Brandon. All along the railway there are nice farms and houses; though the absence of timber gives them a bare and rather comfortless appearance at this time of year.

From Brandon, all the way to Winnipeg, there are farms and signs of settlement, passengers getting in and out at numerous small stations at which we stopped.

A young Englishman who resides near Brandon, to whom I was talking, complained of the summer frosts, which much damaged the wheat crops last summer.

About six in the evening we began to pass engine sheds and buildings, which shewed we were coming to a town of some size. In a few minutes we drew up along side of a long platform, which, like all others I had seen on the Canadian Pacific, was quite uncovered. The conductor walked down the cars, and in a quiet but distinct voice repeated "Winnipeg. All change here!" Again, to our disgust, we were turned out into the cold, the next train for the East not leaving until the following evening. And now commenced my experiences of the bores and troubles of civilization, boys, porters, and hotel runners innumerable laying violent hands on me and on my portmanteau.

I had already ascertained the name of the hotel I intended going to from some people who had joined the train at Brandon, so, as soon as I had got clear of the hotel boys, I went, with a number of my fellow passengers, to the Douglas House, which I found sufficiently expensive; though, I believe, it is

much cheaper than the hotel belonging to the Railway Company.

I was glad to find myself in a bed which was not moving and shaking about; for, although several nights on the cars, I had not quite got used to the rattle and grinding, which is certainly more fatiguing than the motion on board ship.

Winnipeg is a well laid out town, with some very fine new stone buildings, and is lighted by electricity. So the hotel clerk told me; and I was quite content to take his word for it. The thermometer was 40 degrees below zero, and the wind still blowing. Strange as it may seem, I had no wish whatever to go out into the cold for the purpose of looking at Winnipeg.

I spent the following day, the 23rd, indoors. The wind was sweeping down the wide streets, and rendered anything like a walk for pleasure impossible.

I went down to the railway depôt in good time, and took a through ticket to Montreal. From Winnipeg to the Atlantic there are several opposition lines, going south through the United States; and the rates are cheap

indeed, compared with those west of Winnipeg.

I decided to continue on by the Canadian Pacific, as not only more direct than going south via St. Paul, Minn., and the U.S. side, but also because there was no change of car all the way to Montreal. The usual time from Winnipeg to Montreal is, under favourable circumstances, four days and nights.

What kind of a country we passed through during the night I do not know. Daylight brought to our view a country differing entirely from the plains through which we had been travelling.

We were now in a rough, broken, woody country. The timber was small, and for a long distance burnt by forest fires, and the hills nowhere rising to the dignity of even low mountains. The snow was getting much deeper as we proceeded.

At eleven o'clock we arrived at Fort William, once a Hudson Bay trading station, now a town; and about half an hour afterwards we reached Port Arthur (Thunder Bay) on Lake Superior, where we stayed for about an hour, changing engines, conductors, and train hands.

The shore of Lake Superior, close on our right, was ice bound, and looked cold and wintry in the extreme.

The train from the East was several days behind time. The telegraph operators could get replies only from White River, about 100 miles ahead. Beyond that place the storm had evidently thrown down the telegraph wires. Where the Atlantic train was, no one knew. The only answer we could get to our inquiries was—"Don't know."

The country along the northern shore of Lake Superior is rough and rocky without grandeur, and not even picturesque, if we except a few views of the Lake itself. Here the engineers of the Company had one of their hardest pieces of work; indeed this portion of the railway has been open only for a few months, passengers to Winnipeg previously going either by the United States lines, or, in the summer, by steamboat on the lakes to Port Arthur, and thence by the Canadian Pacific Railway to Winnipeg.

Passengers who had been over the new portion of the line told me that the road-bed was as yet very rough, and that we should

have a good shaking; they also gave it as their opinion that the line was blocked with snow. No one, however, anticipated any serious trouble.

There seemed to be quite a number of shops in Port Arthur. If I had had any idea of what was ahead of us, I should have inspected those shops with greater interest, and have laid in a stock of comforts for the inner man.

A little after 1 p.m. on the 24th December we steamed out, with a couple of engines to draw us, and went at a fair speed until shortly after dark, when we came to a standstill at some place. There was a siding, with a few cars on it, which were being used as houses by men working on the railway. Huge icicles hanging from the cars, and deep snow all around, presented anything but a cheerful aspect as we poked our noses out into the cold to try and find out why we were stopping. All we could find out was that there was no answer from the East to telegrams, the wires having come to grief; and that, as there is only a single line of rail, we must stay where we were until we received information of the whereabouts of the Atlantic train. When I

got up the next morning we were still standing still. Another tiresome day ; and the only answer we could obtain to any inquiry as to when we were likely to start was—"Don't know." "White River," I found out, is the name of this delightful place, where we spent our "Merry Christmas."

There were apparently only six or seven real passengers on board, though there were also a good many who had passes, who had, I suppose, been employed on the railway during the summer. Of the passengers, nearly all were going either to Ottawa or Montreal, only one besides myself being bound through to England.

Early on the second morning, a message came from Winnipeg directing us to proceed ahead slowly during daylight. The direction to go ahead slowly savoured of mockery. It was nearly noon before the locomotives were ready to start ; and, when our two engines did steam off, with all steam on, they moved us along but at a sorry pace. We took with us a large force of Norwegian navvies, who lived in the stationary cars at White River, and who completely filled up the cars.

In less than half an hour we came to another stand, in a cut which was nearly filled up with snow. Out poured the Norwegians with their wooden shovels; but they were soon in again, their shoe-packs and leggings covered with snow, and their beards a solid mass of ice. After they had thawed themselves a little, they turned out again, and recommenced shovelling away the snow.

After considerable delay, we succeeded in making our way through the first cut, only to get into another a little further on. Night came, and found us fast in a drift, with a light wind blowing, which drifted the snow, and filled up the track as fast as it was cleared. Our friends, the Norwegians, had frequently to come in to warm themselves; but as frequently did they gallantly return to the charge: each time they came into the cars they perceptibly chilled down the atmosphere.

All through the night we could hear the short whistles of the two locomotives, as the drivers signalled to one another, so that they might put forth their strength at exactly the same moment. The sound brought back to my mind the dear old home of my boyhood,

where I have so often lain awake, listening to the hooting of the owls in the big elm which overshadows what was once my bedroom window.

Daylight found the engine-drivers vainly endeavouring to back out of a bank of snow, as by this time they had quite satisfied themselves that they could not go forward. After many ineffectual attempts, they decided upon reserving their coal and water, as it was now clear that all attempts to extricate the train before the wind went down were useless, the snow drifting into the cut almost as fast as the men shovelled it out; and the men could not work much until the weather moderated. Soon after breakfast, the Norwegians started back for White River, leaving us to our fate. They had no snow-shoes. Although the snow was drifted and packed hard with the wind, occasionally the foot would break through, which made walking without snow-shoes very fatiguing.

Our stock of provisions in the dining car was by no means a large one; but we calculated that within three days we should receive assistance, or at all events a fresh stock of

provisions. More than twice that time elapsed, however, without our seeing anyone. The conductor could not leave the train without orders; and no one seemed to know exactly what to do.

I had promised to be in England soon after New Year's Day. Christmas had passed, and the New Year had come, but England appeared to be further off than ever.

At the end of the week two dog-sleighs, with voyageurs, arrived from Fort Arthur. A relief train had brought them to within a few miles of where we were snowed up. The conductor also received orders to feed the passengers free; but, as nearly everything was already eaten up, we none of us felt much comforted at the strange liberality of the Railway Company.

As the dog-sleighs were going on at once with the mail, I and two of my fellow passengers determined to accompany them. How far we should have to walk none of us at all knew. After a rather hot discussion with the mail agent—that is, a good deal of heat on his part, and perfect good temper on mine—I gained my point that nothing but the letter

mail should go forward, and that the dog-sleighs should carry our wrappers and necessary luggage in place of the paper and parcel post.

Early on Sunday morning, January 3rd, we wished those passengers who preferred remaining with the train Good-bye, and started off. Our party consisted of the mail agent, three passengers including myself, one brakeman, and also Narcisse and two other Hudson Bay voyageurs. The conductor, of course, remained with the passengers in the train. How long it was before they were dug out I do not know. Up to the time I left Montreal, they had not arrived; although the line was reported clear and open between Winnipeg and Montreal.

The first day we made only about seven miles, the travelling, even behind the dog-sleighs, being a little fatiguing for those who had no snow-shoes.

At night we camped out. We found a number of empty cabins and shanties by the side of the railroad as we journeyed along, which had been used during the construction of the line. We did not, however, go far enough the first

day to reach one of these, as some of the party were unused to snow travelling, and were completely tired out. I preferred camping in the open myself, as it was generally more convenient for firewood than round the deserted cabins.

The second day we made a long distance, the snow, excepting in the cuts, being little more than a foot deep. As an old snow-shoe walker, I took my turn in advance, breaking track.

We camped at night at a Section House belonging to the Company. The Section men had not turned out since the storm, but proposed doing so on the following day. The wind had died away; and it was decidedly warmer than it had been for the two previous weeks. The men did not know where the break in the wires was, or how far we should have to go before we should be picked up.

On Thursday, the 7th, we fell in with a party of men from the East, looking for the break in the telegraph wires. We, with true human selfishness, had been picking our footsteps with eyes cast down, without a thought of any but ourselves, and had forgotten all

about the telegraph poles alongside of us, and could not give them any information. They looked cheerful at this, and at us, and at the pleasing prospect of the long trudge before them.

It seems to me that, although the Company could not help the storm, and the trains getting blocked, they might, by a little better management, have saved their servants much labour, and the passengers no little discomfort. They should, I think, have been better prepared for so likely an event, in such a region, as a snow-storm.

On Friday we came across a snow-plough, with a couple of engines, in the snow, and off the track. A strong force of men were endeavouring to get them back on to the rails.

The same evening we met the Atlantic Express, which had been the cause of so much uneasiness to the officials we had left behind us. Those in charge did not seem to be in an express hurry, and kindly stopped to have a talk about the weather, and supplied us, moreover, with a small stock of provisions. Notwithstanding our news, as there was a working party on board, they determined to

proceed, and assist in getting out the snow-plough and in clearing the track.

Early on Saturday, the 9th January, we arrived at a small station, I think Callander by name; and here ended our walk through the snow of 104 miles, which had taken us seven days to accomplish. After some little delay and telegraphing, an engine and car were despatched to our rescue, and we were carried on to Chapleau. Here we found a regular passenger train, and proceeded on our journey without further delay. We passed Ottawa in the afternoon, and arrived late at night at Montreal.

During the winter months, owing to the freezing up of the St. Lawrence, the vessels of the Canadian Steamship Lines sail from Portland, Me., calling at Halifax for the mails, &c. I found that there would be no boat leaving Portland until the following Thursday, January 14th.

Waiting even a few days in a strange city, where you know no one, is always tedious, and at six on Tuesday evening I gladly left by the Grand Trunk Railway for Portland. We travelled all night, and arrived at breakfast

time at Island Pond, just on the American side. Here the U.S. Custom officials examine the luggage. About one o'clock we arrived at Portland.

On the following morning I went on board the Dominion Steamship "Oregon," which, however, did not sail until nearly four in the afternoon. On the 15th, late at night, we reached Halifax, Nova Scotia, and stayed until noon on the following day, waiting for the last Canadian mail; and twelve days later we arrived at Liverpool.

Let those who have crossed the sea in rough weather during the cold season, and who, like myself, are not good sailors, bear witness to the discomfort of a winter trip across the Atlantic. And I felt it somewhat, after having spent Christmas and the New Year in the snow, and after a Winter Trip on the Canadian Pacific Railway.